THE FOX RIVER HOTEL

The last week of March, 1923, brought to the village of Waterford, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hartgers and family from Milwaukee, who a few days before had purchased Hotel Fox River. This well known hostelry had stood lonely and deserted since October, 1922. Upon the arrival of the Hartgers the place began to show signs of life. Doors were opened, rooms were cleaned, curtains hung, men and women went in and out, children played on the sidewalk, automobiles were parked at the curb—waterford was glad.

For six months, the next time in nearly eighty-five years, the traveling public had found no welcome in the entire front of the building. Mr. Russ later, thinking trade was to continue at the same brisk pace, put up a large frame addition at the rear. This housed the large dining room, kitchen, with the huge brick oven, and the living and sleeping rooms of the family. The wonder and fame of the “spring floor” in the back room in the upper story of the addition was known for miles in every direction.

In those early days there were no menus or bills of fare, but wholesome food and an abundance of it was served to the hungry travelers. Festivals, which have been succeeded by the modern banquet, brought guests from a distance of many miles.

Sorrow as well as joy was known in the old hotel. Mrs. Russ died there. Tradition says that the new landlord who took charge several years later never liked the work and in due time Mr. Russ and his wife left Waterford for Mrs. Russ former home in Michigan, where they spent the remainder of their lives. The old hotel was closed and the old building entered upon a new period of existence. It became an “apartment house.” For over twenty years N. H. Palmer acted as agent for the owners.

In 1895 Dr. and Mrs. Boyd Newell purchased the old building of the owner, a Mrs. Wheeler, who had inherited it from her father, Mr. Edwards, it having been taken over by him to satisfy the mortgage placed on it by Mr. Russ at the time he built the large frame addition. The “Old Waterford House” was then repaired and remodeled in such a way as to be hardly recognizable and made a neat and cozy home for Dr. Newell and his family.

For several years after the death of Dr. Newell, his wife made her home there. About a year ago she gave it up and it became the property of Henry Caley.

Several years after Mr. Russ built his famous tavern on the west side of Fox river, a man by the name of Schaub saw a similar place of business was needed on the east side which was rapidly becoming the home of a large number of German immigrants. He erected a building where the Hotel Fox River now stands. When completed this building was rented to Jacob Shenberg, father of Wm. Shenberg, the present postmaster of Waterford. Mr. Shenberg with his family had come from Germany. He came in 1885 locating in Racine. Three years later they came to Waterford, rented the Schaub building and in it opened a hotel and operated it for three years. He then moved to his own building which he had erected on the opposite side of the street. He continued in the hotel business for a number of years. The building was destroyed in the fire of 1898. The Schaub building was then sold to Wenzell Drayhorse immediately after Mr. Shenberg and family moved from it. Mr. Drayhorse ran a hotel for a while then rented the place to Julius Rupiper. Later Mr. Drayhorse sold the hotel to Clausen and Mollzen in 1898.

Under the management of the new firm, the name of Fox River House was given to the hotel and during the thirteen years of its existence under Clausen and Mollzen this house became known to thousands of people who stopped there. Carsten Clausen, was born in Germany, September 21, 1839. He came to Racine in 1865. At the outbreak of the civil war he enlisted as a private in Company K, 41st Regiment, Missouri Volunteers and was stationed at St. Louis, being on provost duty. After the close of the war he was married to Miss Mary Andersen, who also came from Germany, and in 1876 he became a resident of Waterford and with his brother-in-law, N. Mollzen, went in to the hotel business. After three years Mr. and Mrs. Clausen were residents of Waterford. After leaving the village they lived for six years, then went to Racine, the home of their children. Mrs. Clausen died about two years ago. Mr. Clausen is still living and frequently visits Waterford relatives.

Nicholas Mollzen was also born in Germany, February 21, 1838. He came to Racine in 1865 and worked there for three years then with Mr. Clausen went into the hotel business in Waterford. His wife was a sister of Mrs. Clausen. After selling out the business in the late 70’s, Mr. and Mrs. Mollzen remained in Waterford for several years and then moved to Milwaukee where they both died. Their daughter is now living in Milwaukee and occasionally visits the scenes of her early life.

The hotel was sold to Nelson Bros., sons of Halver Nelson, one of the rugged Norwegian pioneers of the early 40’s, who had settled in the northwestern part of the town of Waterford.
The Fox River House was sold to Joseph Wiener and John Nelson, one of the Nelson brothers, who had previously owned a share in it, in 1906, and the business went forward without interruption. Mr. Wiener was born and reared on a farm just north of the village of Waterford. As he grew to manhood he learned the stone mason trade and worked at this until he bought an interest in the hotel. On June 21, 1906 he was united in marriage with Miss Emma Nelson, at Winchester, Wis., returning from their wedding trip they immediately took up the duties of their new business. The work was new to Mr. Wiener but not so to his wife, who had spent a number of months with Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, her uncle and aunt, and had thus become familiar with the work of a large and successful hotel such as the Fox River Co. Mrs. Nelson had valuable experience and training and was able to take up her part of the work.

The new proprietors proved to be as competent as was the former owners. The business was continued without a break and along the same efficient lines, meeting the demands of the public in a most satisfactory manner. During the summer months many city people made the hotel their home while enjoying the freedom and fresh air of country life. The Sunday dinners grew more and more popular and often from seventy-five to a hundred guests were fed. The fact that these same people came back again and again showed the popularity of the hotel and the satisfaction with the food.

Two children, a girl and a boy—Helen and Russell—were born to Mr. and Mrs. Wiener, and destitute their sojourn in the hotel. The Wiener family are now living in a pleasant home on the west side. Mr. Wiener is in the employ of T. M. E. & L. Co.

After the death of John Nelson—"Johnnie" as he was called by his hundreds of friends—the hotel was sold to Maddin and Plucke in 1909. Mr. Plucke withdrew from the partnership soon after and in October, 1922, Mr. Maddin sold his interest to the heirs of John Nelson—John Alexson, Ed. Anderson, Gilbert Olson, Albert Nelson and Edmund Johnson. The stockholders incorporated as the name Fox River Hotel Company.

This company in turn sold the property to the present owner in February, 1922.

Henry Hartges was born and reared in Holland. He came to America in 1902, when twenty-three years of age. That same year he was married in Racine, remaining in that city for five years where he was connected with the S. & M. Manufacturing Company. In 1908 Mr. Hartges and family moved to Milwaukee where he was employed as a locomotive mechanic for Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad. He worked with this company until September 28, 1919, when he met with an unfortunate accident which practically destroyed his right arm, making it impossible for him to continue his work. The following January Mrs. Hartges died, leaving her husband with four children: Frank, aged 16; Mary, 15; Minnie, 11; Henrietta, 4.

Since then Mr. Hartges has been engaged in several lines of work. He owns a two and one-half ton Parker truck which he and his son Frank operate. In the spring of 1922 he was married to Mrs. Ennen, of Milwaukee, who has two children, Catherine, aged 14, and George 7, running a boarding house. Following the marriage of Mr. Hartges and Mrs. Ennen the boarding house was sold and a larger place of business was bought where dinners were served and also "short orders," ice cream, seafood and soft drinks could be secured.

Mr. and Mrs. Hartges were both devoted to going into hotel work, accordingly the business was disposed of and the agency of Theodore Kleth, of Milwaukee, a personal friend of Charles Thompson, a real estate agent of the village of Waterford, Hotel Fox River was purchased of the Fox River Hotel Company. The Waterford hotel has been selected from a group of four propositions—on Waukesha, one at Eagle, one at East Troy and one at Waterford.

Mr. Hartges is well satisfied with the business during the short time he has been in Waterford. He appreciates the splendid welcome, the glad hand, and good will which has been extended by Waterford people and the encouragement given him by the community. When on April 10 the members held a banquet at the hotel which proved to be a far greater success than was anticipated and which showed the interest of the people of the community in the opening of a good hotel in the village. Mr. and Mrs. Hartges have been made to feel right at home and they are looking forward to a big summer’s business. The house, which includes fifteen bed rooms, has been thoroughly cleaned from garret to basement, new beds, bedding and mattresses put in each room. Good substantial meals are being served. Good meals, cleanliness, a home atmosphere, courteous treatment combined with popular prices will soon be bringing to the Hotel Fox River a large and satisfied crowd.

Fortunately indeed are Mr. and Mrs. Hartges in having all their help with the exception of Miss Caroline Johnson, who so faithfully stands by the Hotel Fox River. Summer sorers and tourists will be catered to as well as regular boarders.